

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

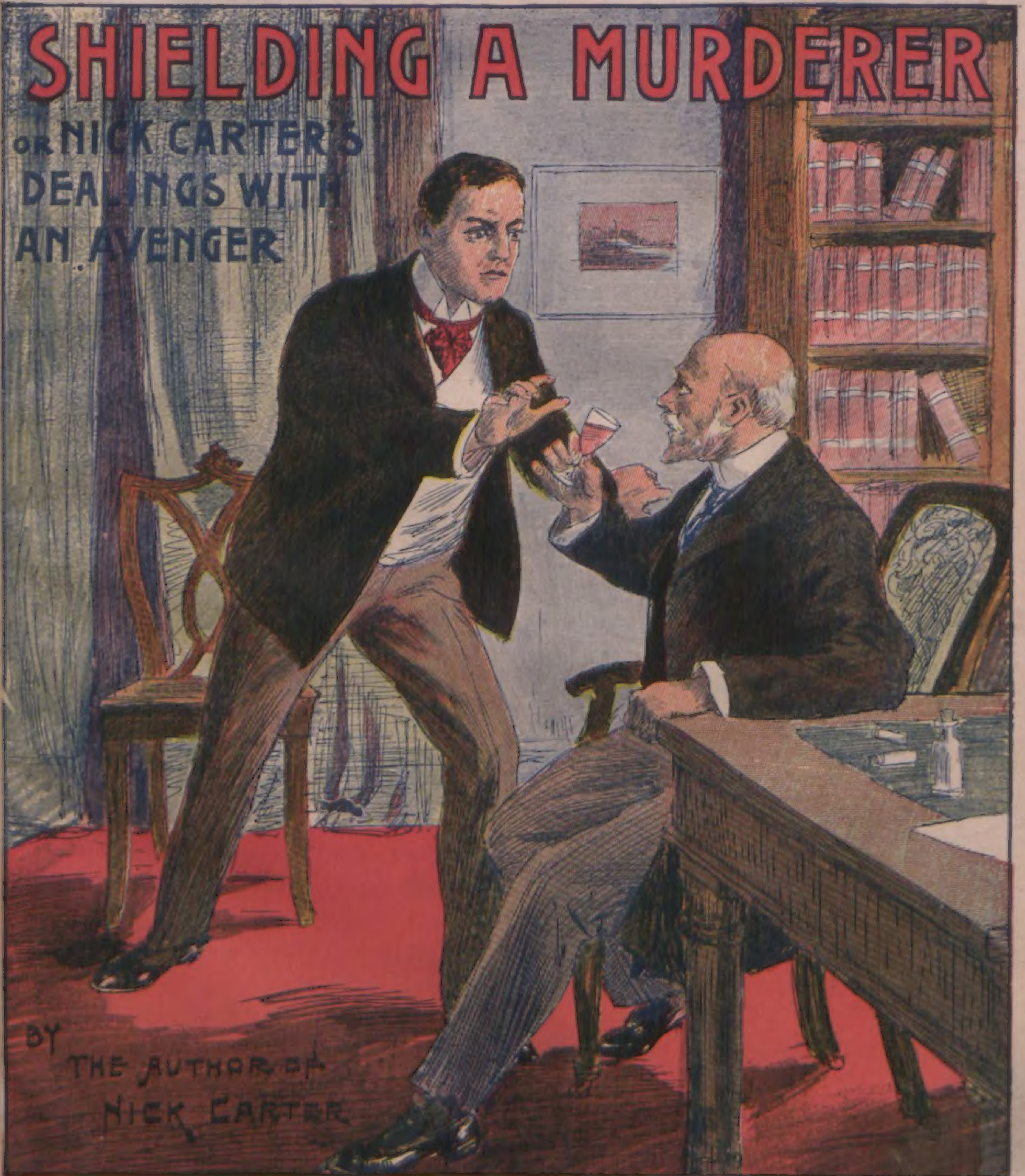
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ONE ONE HALF-PENNY. Price 5 Cents.

SHIELDING A MURDERER

OR NICK CARTER'S
DEALINGS WITH
AN AVENGER



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER

NICK TOOK THE GLASS OF POISONED WINE FROM THE DOCTOR'S HAND.

FOUR NEW NUMBERS 1ST OF EVERY MONTH

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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Shielding a Murderer;

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NICK CARTER'S DEALINGS WITH AN AVENGER.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE TRACKS IN THE GARDEN.

The village marshal unlocked and opened the door of a rear room.

"There," he said, pointing inside, "the body was found in front of the bureau."

Nick Carter stepped into the apartment and glanced sharply around, his keen eyes taking in every detail of the place.

"Has anything been disturbed?" he asked, in a moment.

"Nothing," was the reply. "With one or two exceptions, the room is exactly as I found it yesterday morning, when the body of the murdered woman was discovered lying there on the floor."

"You have done well," replied Nick, with a smile. "Very few out-of-town officers would have exercised such judgment."

The village marshal looked pleased.

"You must remember," he said, "that I am not entirely new at the business. I was for

years a member of the New York police force."

"Your work shows excellent training," said Nick.

"I am glad you think so," replied the official, pleased to have his efforts commended by so noted a detective as Nick Carter, "and I am glad to know that I have been of service to you, for you once helped me out of a difficult case in New York."

"So that is how I came to be called into this case?" asked the detective, with a smile.

"Yes," was the reply. "When this murder was discovered, I went straight to the county sheriff and asked that you be employed on the case. My only fear was that you were too busy to take it."

"Well," replied the detective, "I wanted a breath of fresh air, and so here I am."

The marshal stepped into the front room of the little cottage and dismissed the two watchers who were sitting by the body of

the murdered woman, laid ready for burial in a small sleeping-room adjoining the parlor and sitting-room combined.

"You may go for the present," he said, in explanation. "We want the place to ourselves for a time."

This duty performed, he went back to the detective, who had just arrived from New York in response to a telegram.

"When you want to see the body," he said, "you will find it there in the bed-room."

"Who discovered the body?" asked Nick.

"The milkman."

"Did he look through the cottage?"

"Not at all," was the reply. "He came to the back door with his can, and receiving no answer to his knock, he opened the door and stepped inside."

"And then?"

"He saw the body lying on the floor and hastened away, scared half to death."

"Were you notified at once?"

"Yes; I happened to be passing at the time, and was the second person in the house."

"You saw the body, then, before it was moved from the position in which it was found?"

"Yes."

"Describe the position in which it lay."

"It lay all in a heap there on the floor, with the limbs drawn up as if the last moments of the poor creature had been passed in great agony."

"Go on," said Nick.

"There was a cloth gag in the mouth, and the hands and feet were securely bound."

"Who has had access to this room since the removal of the body?" asked the detective.

"No one."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Well, the husband of the woman was here for a moment, but I was with him."

"And since that time the room has been locked, as we found it?"

"Exactly."

The marshal stepped to the front of the house, and the detective got down on his hands and knees and went over every inch of the floor, even opening and examining the contents of the little cupboard under the sink.

This completed, he went to the room where the body lay.

The face he saw, rigid in death, and with a look of unutterable terror upon it, was that of a woman not far from fifty years of age. The nose was prominent, the cheek-bones were high, the upper lip was short, and the jaw was large and square.

On the whole it was a strong and resolute face.

The hair was quite gray, and just above the left ear was a small mole. During the youth of the woman, it must have been entirely concealed by the hair, which was now quite thin.

From the bed-room the detective went to the little garden in the rear of the cottage and made a close examination of the little patch of ground.

When he returned to his sitting-room his face wore a puzzled look.

"Now," he said, throwing himself into a chair in front of the door leading to the kitchen, "tell me what you have discovered regarding the matter."

The marshal looked confused.

"Nothing," he said, slowly; "absolutely nothing."

"You have a theory, of course?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "The woman was murdered for her money; there can be no doubt of that."

Nick smiled as he glanced around the small and poorly furnished rooms.

The marshal was quick to catch the significance of the detective's manner.

"Notwithstanding the general air of poverty," he said, "the woman had money, and she was foolish enough to exhibit it whenever she paid a bill. It seems that she showed it once too often."

"What did the doctors say?" demanded Nick, abruptly.

"There were no wounds on the body," was the reply. "It is clear that the woman was smothered to death by the cloth used to prevent her crying out."

"What about her husband?"

"According to his story, he arose as usual that morning, after breakfast had been prepared, ate his breakfast, and went away to his work, carrying his dinner pail as usual."

"Where is he employed?"

"At the tub factory?"

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Silent and reserved. I believe he is not well liked by his shopmates."

"At what hour did he leave the house on the morning of the murder?"

"At six o'clock, he says."

"What time was the murder discovered?"

"Shortly after seven."

"And he was notified at once?"

"Of course."

"How did he act?"

"He seemed to be greatly agitated."

"How long has he lived here?"

"About a year. I assure you that suspicion does not point to him in the least."

"Where is he now?"

"After making arrangements for the burial, he went to Chicago to provide himself with suitable clothes."

"When did he leave?"

"Last evening."

"When is he to return?"

"At noon to-day."

Nick arose and walked up and down the little room for a moment, and then asked:

"Was the money you speak of taken?"

"It seems so, for Mr. Clark has been unable to find it."

"How did such a sum of money as you describe come into the possession of the wife of a common mechanic? Doesn't Clark know where she kept it?"

"Those are questions I cannot answer, but he did not act as if he knew."

"And so he searched the premises on general principles?"

"Yes, that is what he was in the kitchen for."

"Did he make an exhaustive search?"

"It did not seem so to me."

"Describe the man, please."

"He is a very ordinary man, about fifty years of age, short, rather muscular."

"Give me his full name, please."

"Sidney Clark."

Nick pondered a moment, and then said:

"I can't understand why he should tell a falsehood about what took place here on the morning of the murder."

The village marshal sprang excitedly to his feet.

"I don't understand you," he said. "There is no proof that he did not tell the truth."

"The proof is very plain," said the detective, "that when Sidney Clark went to his work that morning he left the woman dead on the kitchen floor!"

"Do you mean," exclaimed the marshal, turning pale, "that I have foolishly allowed the guilty person to escape?"

"Wait a moment," said the detective. "Allow me to describe what took place here on the morning of the murder. Then you may draw your own conclusions."

The marshal sank weakly into his chair, and Nick walked to the kitchen door.

"First," began the detective, "Sidney Clark was not in bed when the murdered woman arose that morning. He was not even in the house!"

The village official gazed at the detective in open-mouthed amazement.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

Nick pointed to the kitchen stove.

"The house," he said, "is a model of neatness. Do you think a good housekeeper would make such a muss as that in building the morning fire? Certainly not. That is the work of a man, and the work of a man not familiar with the premises."

The marshal looked blankly before him and said not a word.

"See," continued the detective, "the oven was full of dry wood, and yet it was not touched. On the other hand, the builder of the fire tore papers from the cupboard shelves in order to make a quick blaze. He did this in great haste, for some of the dishes are overturned. Then, observe how he threw the burnt matches about and punched a hole in the mica in the front door of the stove."

"What do you infer from all this?" asked the marshal, finding his tongue at last.

"The inference plainly stated before," replied the detective, "the inference that Sidney Clark lied about what took place here on the morning of the murder. Now, if he lied about his wife getting up first and preparing breakfast, it is more than probable that he lied about everything that took place that morning."

"There must be some mistake," said the marshal. "I can't think I have been deceived in the man."

"The building of the fire being settled," continued the detective, "let us get to the next point. No breakfast was prepared here on the morning in question."

The village official seemed absolutely stupefied by the assertion of the detective.

"You are putting it on pretty thick," he finally said, with a slow smile, which seemed to be forced.

Nick pointed to the kitchen stove and to the open cupboard door.

"See," he said, "the fire burned but a few moments, and the dishes remain in the position in which the hasty removal of the papers from the shelves left them. It is clear that the fire did not burn long enough to cook even a frugal meal that morning, and equally plain that the dishes were not used at all."

"What was the fire built for?" demanded the marshal.

"For the purpose of destroying papers of some kind," was the reply.

Nick opened the pocket-book as he spoke.

"It seems," he continued, "that the fire did not do its work well, for I have a number of half-burned documents here which may throw some light on the case."

The marshal stepped forward to examine the find, but the detective closed the book and returned it to his pocket.

"There will be time enough to look at the papers," he said, "after we have learned something about the murder."

"This looks like magic," said the marshal. "Can it be possible that Sidney Clark murdered his wife and went calmly away to his work, leaving her dead body lying on the kitchen floor?"

"No," said Nick, "Sidney Clark did not murder his wife."

"Who did, then?" asked the marshal.

"That is what we are here to discover," was the reply. "Sidney Clark left his home before sunrise that morning, wearing a pair of long-topped rubber boots. He passed out at the back door and went in the direction of the railway depot. After he had disappeared, the murderer, who had lain concealed in the garden for some time, entered the cottage and committed the crime."

"But he must have returned home," said the marshal, "for he went to the factory with his dinner pail in his hand."

"He did return," said Nick, "and when he entered the house he found his wife dead."

"This is incomprehensible," said the village official. "Do you mean to say that he was the first one to discover the murder, and that he went away without giving the alarm?"

"Exactly. He took off his heavy rubber boots, put on the light ones worn in the shop, threw some crusts and scraps of meat into his dinner pail, and went off to the factory, knowing that he would be called back directly."

"If this is all true, Sidney Clark is an accessory before the fact," said the marshal.

"Don't be too fast," said the detective. "We are just starting in on this case, and we must feel our way. What possible motive could he have had in the death of his wife? Were they ever known to quarrel?"

"I think not."

"Then let us give Sidney Clark the benefit of the doubt for the time being."

"But I can't understand how you discovered all this about his leaving the house before sunrise, about the rubber boots, and about the way he put up his noonday lunch."

Nick opened the door of the little cupboard under the sink.

"There are the rubber boots," he said, "and there is the dinner pail, just as he took it to the shop that morning."

"The pail tells its own story," said the marshal, looking into it; "but how about the boots?"

"The murder was committed on Tuesday morning," said Nick. "Well, it rained heavily all of Monday night, and on Tuesday morning the earth hereabouts was soaked with water.

"Just back of the garden fence there is a patch of clay. The yellow-marks of the clay are still on the boots, and the prints of the boots are still observable in the clay.

"Now, the foot-prints were made when the clay was soft and saturated with water, or

they would not be so deep. If they had been made at some time previous to Tuesday, they would have been washed away by the rain.

"So, you see, the tracks were made after the rain, and before the earth had time to dry off, or before the hot sun of Tuesday shone down on the patch of clay."

"But I can't understand——"

"We are not supposed to understand the matter the first hour," interrupted Nick, with a smile. "Now mark what took place after the departure of Sidney Clark, summoned away in order that the murderer might have full swing in the cottage."

"Yes," said the marshal, "he must have been drawn from the house by a note or message of some kind."

"Well," continued Nick, "after the departure of the husband the murderer crept in from the garden."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

The village official was about to speak when Nick laid a hand on his arm and pointed toward the gate in front.

"Who is the person just entering the yard?" he asked.

The marshal shook his head.

"He doesn't belong in the village," he said, regarding the new-comer steadily. "I never saw him before."

"Just as I supposed," said Nick. "Now, be careful what you say in his presence."

The stranger passed through the gateway and up the path leading to the cottage door.

He seemed to be a remarkably well-preserved man of about sixty. He was expensively dressed, and his gray beard was carefully trimmed. As he advanced along the walk he gave no evidence of haste or excitement. He seemed to be a thorough man of the world.

When his knock sounded on the panels of

the cottage door Nick stepped forward and admitted him.

After glancing hastily around the apartment for a moment he turned to the marshal.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I expected to find Mrs. Sidney Clark here."

Without saying a word the village official pointed to the little sleeping-room.

The stranger stepped quickly into the room and stood bent for a moment over the still figure on the bed.

Nick stood by his side, watching every expression of his face.

He started at the first sight of the body, and then stood for some moments looking down on the dead face.

"When did she die?" he asked, finally.

"Yesterday morning," replied the detective.

"That is singular," said the stranger, coolly. "I am managing some small business affairs for her and I was not even aware that she was ill."

"She was in her usual health five minutes before her death," said the detective. "She was murdered."

"Murdered!"

The stranger started violently as he spoke, but his face was without excitement.

Nick Carter made a mental note of the fact and waited.

"Who could have murdered the inoffensive old lady?" continued the stranger. "I was not aware that she had an enemy in the world."

"It is a strange case," said the village official.

"Have the officers been set to work?" demanded the other. "Has the murderer been caught?"

"The officers are at work," replied the detective, "but the man who committed the crime is not yet in custody."

The stranger seated himself by the side of

the bed and looked up into the face of the detective.

"She was murdered for what little money she had in the house?" he asked.

"Certainly," was the reply. "You, as her man of business, ought to know how much money she had."

"Very little," was the guarded answer. "Not more than a thousand dollars in all."

There was a short silence, during which the stranger seemed to be mentally sizing up the detective.

Nick aided him in arriving at a conclusion by looking as stupid as possible.

"I came here," began the stranger, in a moment, "to secure legal papers, important in a small way, for record. I may look for them, I presume?"

The marshal shook his head.

"You must wait," he said, "until the return of her husband."

"She had a husband then?"

"Certainly."

"I have done her business for a long time," said the other, "but I always believed her to be a widow."

"Her husband will be here at noon," said the marshal.

"But my business is important, and my time is valuable," began the stranger, "perhaps——"

At a motion from Nick the marshal interrupted him.

"I am sorry," he said, "but it is useless to urge the matter. I am in charge here, and nothing shall be disturbed until the arrival of Mr. Sidney Clark."

An expression of rage swept over the face of the attorney.

"You shall regret this," he said, rising to his feet. "You shall learn that my business is not to be delayed by the boorishness of country constables."

Nick thought the attorney raised his voice

to an unnecessarily loud key, and for an instant he waited for a reply, the lawyer's words seeming to him like a signal previously agreed upon.

The attorney started toward the door.

Then the answer came.

A cloud of smoke swept into the room, and from the street outside came a cry of fire.

The fire seemed to be in the basement, for little puffs of smoke were already making their way through the flooring.

The attorney sprang back into the cottage and stood pointing toward the dead woman lying on the bed.

"Don't let the corpse burn," he shouted. "Carry it out, and let me see what can be done toward saving the cottage."

Without a word Nick darted into the kitchen and sprang through the rear door into the garden, where he had previously observed an outside cellar door.

The door was open, and just beyond the wall of shrubbery which concealed the back of the garden from view, the detective saw a rapidly disappearing form.

In a short time, in response to his calls for assistance, a dozen men were at his side, pulling and tearing at the pile of blazing boxes which had been stacked against the wall and fired by some unknown hand.

Seeing that the blaze could not last long under such vigorous treatment, the detective hastened to the room above.

The marshal stood in the door keeping a crowd of excited villagers at bay.

The attorney, with a look of eager expectancy upon his face, stood by the head of the bed. Nick noticed that his hands rested carelessly upon the unbroken surface of the cottage wall, exactly at the head of the bed.

"This is all very clumsy work," thought the detective, as he laid his hand on the attorney's shoulder.

"What do you expect to find there?" he asked, with a smile.

The attorney started back with a frown.

"I meant to secure the papers in spite of you and your boorish companion," he exclaimed, "but it seems that they are not here."

He moved toward the door as he spoke, and Nick followed on after him, still with that meaning smile on his face.

"I regret to lose your company at this critical moment," he said, "but it may be necessary for me to meet you in Chicago before I have done with the case. Good-day."

The lawyer started at the word Chicago, then bowed and pushed his way through the crowd to the gate and made his way down the street.

"Don't let him go away without giving an account of himself," whispered the marshal. "I believe he had something to do with setting fire to the cottage."

The detective drew the excited man back into the cottage and closed the door.

"Why do you think of that?" he asked.

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" was the reply. "Besides, we ought to learn from him something regarding the past life of the woman."

Nick, laughing softly to himself, drew a tape measure from his pocket and bent over the spot on the floor where the attorney had stood upon entering the room.

The marshal looked on in amazement.

The detective unrolled his tape and took a measurement.

"The fellow's heel rested exactly on the edge of this crack," he said, "while his toe reached to this knot, thus giving the length of his shoe."

"What has that to do with the matter?" demanded the marshal, in an impatient tone.

"It proves," was the reply, "that the gentleman who has just favored us with a call is not the person who lay concealed in the garden on the morning of the murder."

"But he attracted our attention while his confederate set fire to the cottage," insisted the village official. "That is enough!"

"You are undoubtedly correct," said Nick, coolly, "but we are not here to investigate a case of arson."

"But we might have learned something from him regarding the woman," persisted the marshal. "I don't understand why you allowed him to escape."

"That will develop later on," replied Nick. "It is enough for the present for us to know that he did not succeed in destroying by fire the documents which the murderer failed to secure."

The marshal remained silent.

"We could have learned nothing from the fellow," Nick continued, "for he would have lied us off the track."

"I guess you are right."

"There is no doubt of it."

"So far as the documents are concerned," said the marshal, "we have proof that the murderer secured some of them, and that he fed them to the kitchen stove. You have some of the remnants in your possession now."

"He did not secure all of them," said Nick, coolly, "so he set fire to the cottage before leaving it, hoping to destroy them and to hide all traces of his bloody act."

"Do you mean that this is the second attempt that has been made to burn the house?"

"Certainly. The murderer prepared the pile of dry material in the cellar, and set fire to it before leaving the scene of his crime."

"Then why didn't the house burn down?"

"Because the husband came back in time to extinguish the blaze."

The wondering marshal remained silent, looking at the detective as he might have looked at a magician.

"By making a visit to the cellar," continued the detective, "you will see charred boards which were not burned a moment ago, and you will also see the marks of the rubber

boots, fresh from the patch of clay in the rear of the garden."

"Well," said the marshal, "this is all Greek to me, but it seems to have been a mighty foolish thing, this setting fire to the house the second time in broad daylight, and in the presence of a crowd of people. No one but a fool would have attempted such a thing."

"You don't seem to understand the necessities of the case," said Nick. "The husband is expected here at noon. Well, they wanted to secure the papers or destroy them before his arrival. That is why they attempted so daring a crime, and it shows what sort of men we have to deal with in the case."

"They had an idea that in the excitement of removing the body from the burning building the papers could be secured, or they possibly thought that the cottage would be burned to the ground and the papers destroyed. You see, they had two chances of success."

"Why do you say 'they'?"

"Because we are dealing with three men, possibly with four, all strangers here."

"Who are they?"

"The murderer, the attorney, and the man who disappeared over the garden fence after setting fire to the house."

"And you are allowing the only two that you know anything about to escape," said the marshal, reproachfully.

"They will return," said Nick quietly.

"I am not so sure of that."

"They will risk everything for the papers."

"How could valuable papers be in the possession of the wife of a common mechanic?"

"The dead woman was something more than the wife of a common mechanic, and she was not murdered for the money she had concealed in the house. Let me tell you something more of what took place here on the morning of the murder."

"First, the husband was called away by a note, asking him to meet the writer in the vicinity of the railway depot before sunrise.

"He kept the appointment, but found no one there. On his return home, in the excitement of finding his wife was dead, he dropped the note under the sink when he put away his rubber boots.

"After the departure of Sidney Clark from the house, the man who had for some time remained concealed in the raspberry bushes in the garden, crept into the house, probably thinking to find the woman asleep.

"In this he was mistaken, for the woman was up and engaged in dressing. She instantly recognized the intruder and arose to talk with him instead of crying out. So she must have known him well.

"She passed into the kitchen, wearing a pair of blue woolen stockings, and was there seized and strangled to death.

"She was a strong woman, and fought hard, but was finally overcome. Then the murderer burned the papers he had discovered, and continued his search for more, which he did not find."

"Her feet were dressed as you describe," said the marshal, "but how did you discover what she wore?"

Nick pointed to some shreds of blue woolen yarn caught under long slivers of the hard wood floor.

"The husband returned while the search was in progress," continued the detective, "and the murderer escaped unseen to the cellar.

"Once there, he conceived the idea of setting fire to the cottage and piled the boxes and barrels he found there up in a heap, ending by setting them on fire.

"Then he made his escape. But the husband, warned of the condition of affairs by the smoke, hastened to the cellar and extinguished the fire before it had gained much headway.

"Then, for some reason of his own, the husband put up his lunch and went away to his work."

"Why should he do that?"

"That remains to be discovered. There is not a doubt in my mind that he knows the murderer. Why he should protect him is more than I can understand."

"He may have had a hand in the conspiracy."

"I don't think so. Now we get back to the papers. The murderer, having failed to either secure or destroy them, sends the man we saw a few moments ago, and sends him in disguise."

"In disguise?"

"Certainly. The fellow's whiskers were false."

The marshal looked at the detective as if he feared he was losing his mind.

"Now, this shows that the papers were the real motive for the crime, and it is clear that other attempts will be made to secure them."

"But when?"

"That is more than I can tell. I mean, however, to remain here alone to-night."

"Alone with the body?"

"Of course. If the husband returns, he must not even know that I am here."

"If he returns!" echoed the marshal. "He will be here at noon."

"I have my doubts about that," said Nick, with a smile.

Nick passed the afternoon in a systematic search of the house, and at dusk had a neat bundle of things which he wished to look into.

The husband had not returned.

At ten o'clock the marshal left the cottage, and Nick extinguished the lights and sat down to wait.

At twelve o'clock there was a slight movement at the window of the little sleeping-room where the body lay, and the detective knew that some one was entering.

He arose and crept softly in that direction.

The window was up and the body was not in its old place.

Then another dark form appeared in the opening, and a stealthy footstep was heard on the floor.

The detective sprang forward, but the next instant he was caught from behind and forced back against the wall of the sitting-room.

The next moment the bed-room sash fell with a loud crash.

CHAPTER III.

MR. SIDNEY CLARK.

"At last, murderer!"

Following the fall of the sash, there was a rush of footsteps in front of the cottage, and then all was still.

Nick Carter realized that a mistake had been made.

The man who held him as with a grip of steel was not the man he was there to take into custody!

The men who had twice attempted the destruction of the cottage, and possibly the murderer, were escaping while he struggled with an unknown foe in the darkness.

"At last, murderer!" repeated the detective's antagonist. "Now that we are face to face, and alone, we can settle the matter without the aid of the law."

For a moment the struggle was a desperate one, for the detective had been taken unawares, and his antagonist was both strong and nimble.

Exerting all his wonderful strength, Nick finally threw the man to the floor and held him there, clasping both his hands in order to prevent the use of a deadly weapon.

"Now," he said slowly, "perhaps you will tell me who you are, and what this attack means."

The man on the floor started at the sound of the detective's voice.

At that instant the sound of a pistol shot came from the street outside.

Then the voices of excited men were heard.

"I have blundered again," panted the prisoner. "For God's sake don't keep me here. Don't you hear them running away?"

"If they are running away," said Nick, "it is your own fault. Why did you interfere? I should have had them both in a moment."

"This is no time to talk," said the other. "Release me."

"Not so fast," replied Nick, coolly. "Tell me who you are, and why you used the language you did a moment ago."

"I am Sidney Clark," was the reply, "and I thought I had one of the murderers in my power."

The voice of the village marshal was now heard at the door.

"What is wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Nick.

"But," insisted the official, "I heard a sash fall here, and then two men ran away."

"And you shot at them?"

"Yes."

Sidney Clark raised his head as if about to speak, but the detective warned him to be silent.

"I want to talk with you before the marshal knows you are here," he whispered. "I will ask the question you had in mind."

"Come," said the marshal, "why don't you let me in?"

"All in good time," replied Nick. "Did your shot take effect?"

"I am afraid not," was the reply, and Clark seemed relieved.

"Then watch the railway depot for an hour and then return here."

"They won't go to the depot," whispered Clark.

"Of course not, but I must keep the marshal busy or he will be prowling around the cottage."

Nick waited until the marshal's footsteps could no longer be heard, and then led Clark into the kitchen.

First seeing that the heavy window shades were closely drawn, the detective produced his dark lantern and flashed its rays upon the face of his late antagonist.

It was the face of a determined, sullen and revengeful man, not far from fifty years of age.

The man shrank away from the strong light and made an effort to move toward the door.

"It appears to me," said the detective, "that I have seen you before. Your face seems familiar."

"Possibly."

"You came here in search of the man who murdered your wife?" asked Nick, in a moment.

Sidney Clark remained silent.

"And you trailed the men who were here a moment ago from the city, of course? You said a moment ago that you thought you had one of them."

Clark only frowned.

"I don't mean that you followed in their footsteps. I mean that you learned in the city that they were here, and followed them out, taking the way they were likely to have taken."

"I went to the city to buy clothes for the funeral," was the sullen reply.

"Where are the clothes you bought?"

The man quailed under the keen eyes of the detective, and glanced furtively over the solid garments he wore.

"I changed my mind and did not buy them," he said.

"Lie number two," said Nick, coolly.

"What, then, is lie number one?" demanded Clark, impetuously.

"Lie number one," said Nick, "was the statement that you left your wife alive and well when you went to the factory or the morning of the murder."

"Who are you?" demanded the husband. "What right have you to make such assertions?"

"Allow me to explain why you went to Chicago," said Nick, without noticing the man's questions. "When you left your wife lying dead on the kitchen floor that morning, you knew what hand had stricken her down."

An exclamation of rage came from the lips of the unwilling listener, but Nick went on remorselessly:

"After extinguishing the fire started by the murderer in the cellar, you went to the shop, partly to gain time for thought, and partly to protect the murderer of your wife."

"It is false!"

"What reason you had, and still have, for protecting the man is a mystery to me. Well, you were called from the shop, but you remained silent regarding your knowledge of the happenings of the morning."

"I had nothing to tell," broke in the enraged man. "Is it likely that I would protect the man who murdered my wife?"

"It is not natural that you should do so," was the reply, "but that is exactly what you did do, and exactly what you are doing now."

Sidney Clark made a movement toward the door again, and Nick drew a pair of shining handcuffs from his pocket and placed them on the table within reach.

"Make the slightest effort to escape," he said, "and I will ornament your wrists with these."

Clark sank sullenly back into his chair.

"While you are talking," he said, "the men who recently attempted to force an entrance into the house are getting away."

"After listening to the details of the murder," said the detective, "you remained

away to Chicago, not to procure clothing, as you have just stated, but to seek the murderer in haunts well known to yourself."

"You seem to be a fair imitation of Nick Carter," broke in Clark, with an evil smile.

"Arriving in Chicago, you proceeded to look for your man. He was not to be found. On the contrary, you learned that he, knowing you were in Chicago, had dispatched confederates to this place for the purpose of completing in your absence the work he had begun."

"Go on," said Clark, grimly.

"You trailed the confederates here, but arrived too late to effect their capture."

"My arrival at the exact moment of the attempted burglary was purely accidental," said Clark.

"That is lie number three," said Nick, "and it does not agree with your former statement. You have some strong reason for not turning these men over to the law. I have no doubt you would shoot them on sight. Now, with regard to the murderer, the man you followed to Chicago.

"You expected to find him here, for you believed he had followed his confederates. In this you were mistaken, for he did not return. He is still in Chicago."

Clark started again, but remained silent.

"I say murderer," continued Nick, "for the crime was committed by one man, and a remarkably muscular man at that."

Clark's face, seen under the strong light of the lantern, looked like the face of a corpse.

"You must be a wizard," he said, "to know all this."

"I say he was a muscular man," resumed the detective, "because your wife was a strong woman, and he strangled her to death single handed and alone."

"But she was bound hand and foot," suggested Clark.

Nick arose and went to the place where he had deposited his small bundle.

Removing the wrapping, he took from the package three strips of strong cotton cloth.

"Observe the large piece with which she was gagged," he said. "It is torn and strained in the centre, and there is no kind of doubt that the straining and tearing was done with human hands and teeth. In short, by the hands and teeth of your wife. So she was gagged before she was bound.

"Now, observe these two pieces, with which her hands and feet were secured. They are not strained in the least. The wrinkles are hardly removed from the fabric. This shows that there was no struggle after they were placed in the position in which they were found, on the hands and feet of the murdered woman.

"This proves conclusively that they were adjusted after she was dead. Now, what does this prove? Simply that the murderer sought to leave the impression that the crime had been committed for the purpose of robbery, and that the woman had been bound hand and foot and gagged merely to prevent her crying out and resisting the taking of her property."

"Before you go any further," interrupted Clark, "be good enough to tell me who you are."

"All in good time," said Nick. "Now let us get back to the murderer, a description of whom you might have given to the officers on the morning the crime was discovered."

"According to your own story," said Clark, "I did not see the man who murdered my wife."

"No, not that morning, for you would have killed him on sight, as I said a few moments ago. You did not see him that morning, but you knew then and know now who he was. Had you told the truth, he would not be at large now."

Clark did not speak.

"On account of your failure to describe the

fellow," resumed the detective, "I am obliged to give a description of my own."

Clark smiled.

Nick took a thorny raspberry stalk from his bundle and held it up to the light.

"First," he said, "he was dressed in a fine black suit of imported cloth. What do you say to the ordinary thug wearing that kind of garments?"

Clark restrained himself only by a strong effort.

"Second," continued the detective, "he wore a pair of 'toothpick' shoes and a silk hat."

"You are a good guesser," interrupted Clark.

"Third," said Nick, "he is a man about five feet four inches in height, with small hands and feet, coarse black hair, and a swarthy complexion."

Clark sprang to his feet.

"This is extraordinary," he exclaimed.

"What have you to say regarding the description?" asked Nick, regarding the fellow keenly.

Clark hesitated.

"I know nothing about the man," he said, finally.

"And yet," said Nick, "you remarked a moment ago that I was a good guesser, and, although you did not see him that morning, you went to Chicago to look him up."

"You infer too much."

"I hardly know what to make of you," said the detective, thoughtfully. "You have it in your power to make easy work of this case, and yet you persist in throwing every possible obstacle in the way of the officers."

"As I supposed, then, you are a detective?"

Clark asked the question with a touch of scorn in his voice.

"Yes, I am a detective, and I mean to bring the man who murdered your wife to the gallows."

Clark laughed harshly.

"If you succeed," he said, "you will deprive me of a very pleasant duty."

"You mean to take the law into your own hands, just as I have been saying," said Nick.

"I would kill him on sight."

"I believe you," replied Nick. "Your manner at the time of our encounter in the next room ought to be proof enough of your intentions in the matter. You want to avenge your wife's death, and you want the murderer out of the way."

Clark rose and walked up and down the floor, laboring, evidently, under great excitement.

"If I had remained at home that morning," he said, "all would have been well."

"Had you no suspicions?"

"None whatever. Why should I have had?"

"And yet, you had good reason to know that the life of your wife might be attempted at any moment."

"How do you know that?"

"Because it was finally taken, and because for some reason you are shielding the murderer."

"You are unreasonable. Why should I do that?"

"Well," said Nick coolly, "I don't know as I can state the reason exactly, but it is my impression that you are doing it because you dare not aid in bringing him to trial."

"And yet you said a short time ago that I meant to kill him," said Clark.

"Killing and bringing to trial are two different things," said the detective.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Nick, "that at some time in your life you have been very intimate with the man we are talking of, and that you are afraid he would make unpleasant disclosures were he brought to trial."

Clark did not speak, but his manner indi-

cated that the detective had made a ten-strike.

"This being the case," continued Nick, "I have little to hope for so far as your assistance is concerned."

"You do not seem to be making much progress at the present time," said Clark. "Your friend, the village marshal, will become impatient."

At that instant footsteps were heard outside, and the voice of the marshal came through the broken sash.

"What are you doing in there?" he demanded. "Will you show yourself, or must I force my way in?"

Warning Clark to remain where he was Nick stepped to the door and opened it.

"Did you find the burglars?" he asked.

"Certainly not. They had too long a start."

"What next?" asked Nick.

"I leave that to you," said the marshal. "Who were you talking with? I am certain I heard voices as I came up."

"With Sidney Clark."

"Impossible! When did he arrive?"

"He followed the burglars from Chicago."

Hearing his name mentioned, Clark stepped into the room.

The open bed-room door at once attracted his attention, and he was soon at the side of the bed.

"Look here," he shouted, in a moment, "what vandal has been disturbing the body?"

The detective had been reserving this surprise for the last moment.

The body, as Nick had before observed, had been moved from the position in which it had been left by the watchers, and now lay on its face against the wall at the back of the bed. The front of the mattress was thrown up, revealing a small pocket on the under side.

Nick eyed the husband keenly, and waited for him to speak.

"My God," he exclaimed, "they seem to have gotten the papers they sought."

"So," said Nick, with a smile, "they were after papers, after all?"

"Yes," said Clark, "and they deal with more than one life."

CHAPTER IV.

CLOSED BY DEATH.

Nick hastened outside and bent over the fresh marks in the soft earth under the broken window.

The foot-prints were clearly not those of the disguised man who had visited the cottage that day.

They were identical with the foot-prints of the man who had fled from the garden at the time of the fire.

"I thought so," mused Nick. "The lawyer brought this fellow along to do the dirty work. Now, I wonder why the lawyer's foot-prints do not show. There were certainly two men at the window."

A closer examination of the earth under the window revealed the faint prints of a large pair of rubbers.

"The lawyer is cunning," thought the detective, "and he has doubtless been up to tricks of this sort before."

When Nick arose to his feet he saw the marshal standing only a few feet away.

"What do you make out?" asked the official.

Nick briefly explained what he had discovered.

"Clark is about crazy over the loss of the papers," said the marshal, after the detective had concluded.

"He is searching the house again, I presume?" said Nick.

"Yes; he thinks the papers may still be there. The fact of the matter is that he does not know where his wife kept them."

"Let him hunt," said Nick, "only we must be sure and not let him make off with them in case they are found."

"Do you think he will try that game?"

"Certainly."

"Why should he?"

"Because they might supply the clew we want."

"How so?"

"They may point to persons having a motive for the murder of the woman, and they may place Clark in the power of the murderers and so insure his silence."

"I ought to have thought of that," said the marshal.

There was a short silence, during which the detective listened to the hasty steps of the searcher in the cottage; and then the marshal said:

"But supposing that he does not find them?"

"Then he may be sufficiently angry to give us the clew we want. He has only to open his mouth to clear up the whole case."

"It seems to me that you are too positive about his knowing all about the perpetrators of the crime," said the marshal.

"I am willing to stake my reputation on it," said Nick. "He knows who the men are, and means to have them punished."

"Then why doesn't he tell?"

"Because he means to murder them with his own hand."

The marshal shuddered.

"You are a strange man," he said. "Wouldn't it be much better for him to point them out and allow the law to take its course?"

"Not from his point of view. At some time in his life, he has been mixed up in crime with these men, and he knows that a trial and conviction would end in their all hanging together. In planning to take the law of the murderers, he is also planning to save his own."

"I see."

"And so," continued Nick, "he will have to be pretty angry in order to open his mouth."

"I should think so, when his life is at stake."

"Still, he may do so, if he discovers that the papers are in the hands of the men who murdered his wife; that is, if we are there to talk with him when he makes the discovery, and promise him partial immunity from punishment for his misdeeds."

"Then he must be watched."

"Of course, and he must not know that he is watched."

"We can easily keep track of his movements from the windows."

"Yes," said Nick, "go in and tell him any story you please to account for our absence."

The marshal disappeared and soon returned with the statement that Clark had appeared greatly pleased at the idea of being left alone in the cottage.

"Now," said the detective, "one can watch him as well as two. I am anxious to examine the scraps of papers taken from the stove this morning, for they may furnish some clew to work on, and so I will take a room at the hotel. Be vigilant, and on no account leave the fellow alone for an instant."

"And if he finds the papers?"

"Arrest him."

"And if he does not find them?"

"Arrest him."

The marshal laughed.

"Whichever way it goes," he said, "the fellow is in hard luck."

"He may not be in custody long," said Nick.

"I hope not," was the reply, "for I pity the fellow."

Nick moved away toward the hotel, and the village official turned back to the broken window, from which a fair view of the two front rooms of the cottage could be had, the

bed-room door-way being near the front wall.

In the meantime Clark was busy in the little bed-room.

First, he went over the floor, prying into the cracks with the point of his knife, in the hope of finding some secret hiding place.

Unsuccessful at this point, he next began an examination of the walls of the room.

After a long search he discovered, by sounding the wall, a secret panel at the head of the bed.

The spot was the exact one upon which the lawyer's hand had rested.

Trembling with expectancy, Clark opened the panel and drew out a small box.

Looking in from the window, the marshal saw him convey the box to the sitting-room and place it on the table.

The face of the man was whiter than that of the woman lying in the room he had just left.

He forced the blade of his knife under the cover and pried it up.

The box was empty.

With an exclamation of rage Clark hastened into the bed-room and threw up the edge of the mattress.

A little pocket on the under side, which Nick had previously observed, was now in plain sight.

Clark bent over and looked into it.

A moment later he drew out a small key.

Then, moving back to the box, he inserted the key in the lock.

It opened without difficulty.

"I understand it all now," he muttered. "The body was misplaced in order to secure the key. I wonder why they returned it to its place after opening the box?"

The marshal watched with bated breath.

"It was a cunning piece of work," muttered Clark, in a moment. "I was not to be allowed to know that the papers had been found. To have removed the box, or to have broken it open, or to have carried away the key would have told the story."

After some thought Clark restored the box to the secret hiding place where he had found it, and replaced the key in the pocket.

"There," he muttered, "they will deny having the papers, and will point to the undisturbed box and key as proof of the assertion that my wife removed the papers before her death! Oh, I have cunning men to deal with, but we shall see who will win in the end."

The marshal moved away from the window and approached the front door of the cottage.

He had not heard Clark's muttered expressions, but the discovery of the empty box had told the story.

He believed that the papers had been taken from the box by the men who had entered the cottage, and who would have been captured by the detectives but for Clark's untimely arrival and subsequent mistake.

He wondered at the intruders' knowledge of the hiding place, but had no time to waste in theories.

Clark had clearly abandoned the search, and the only thing for him to do was to obey the orders of the detective and take him into custody.

As the official opened the door, Clark sprang to his feet and hastened into the little room.

"It is possible," he muttered, "that they did not have time to get to the box, or that they found it empty."

The marshal watched him search the room for some evidence of the success of the burglars.

In a moment Clark threw up his hand with an oath.

"There it is!" he shouted, facing the marshal, then seen for the first time since his supposed departure.

"What is it?"

Clark bent over and raised a small pink ribbon from the floor.

"There," he said, "my wife kept that about

the papers. I wonder that I did not see it before, but the room was none too light."

"Was it there yesterday morning?" asked the marshal, hardly knowing, in the excitement of the moment, what he was saying.

"It was not," almost shouted Clark. "I should have seen it by daylight. The papers have been stolen."

"You seem to regard the loss of the papers as a greater calamity than the murder of your wife," said the marshal.

Clark threw himself into a chair.

"You don't understand," he said.

There was a short silence.

The duty of arresting the man was to the marshal a hateful one.

"Tell me about the papers," he said, finally.

Clark looked up with a strange expression in his eyes.

In the faint light of the lamp, which had been lighted for the purpose of making the search, he looked more like a demon than a man.

"Am I right," he said, "in supposing that the man I mistook for the murderer to-night is a city detective having charge of the case?"

The marshal nodded.

"Then bring him here," said Clark, "and I will bring these men to the gallows if I keep them company."

"He was right, then, in supposing that you know who the murderers are?" asked the marshal.

"Yes, bring him here at once—before I relent."

The marshal hesitated.

"You will not attempt to escape?" he asked.

"No."

"Perhaps you had better go with me to the men."

"No: I will tell the story here, by the dead body of my wife or not at all."

"You seem to be in earnest," said the marshal, "and I think I will trust you."

He turned toward the door as he spoke, but Clark stopped him with a low exclamation, and he turned back.

"What is it?" he asked.

Clark pointed toward the rear room.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"I heard nothing."

"Surely I heard the sound of stifled breathing."

The marshal took the lamp in his hand and started toward the kitchen door.

Clark sprang to his feet.

"Go on," he said. "I must have been mistaken."

In the short silence that followed the sound of soft footsteps came from the thick darkness of the rear room.

The marshal, wondering at the sudden change in the man, again started toward the door.

Clark seized him roughly by the arm.

"Go and bring your friend," he said, hoarsely, "or I shall refuse to make the disclosures I promised a moment ago."

"But there is some one out there."

"It must have been the wind."

The marshal placed the lamp on the table and left the cottage.

Clark heard the gate close, and then hastily extinguished the light.

The next moment he was crouching in a corner of the room, with a knife in his hand.

He was at no loss to account for the noises he had heard.

He had been watched by the murderers!

He knew that his conversation with the marshal had been overheard.

The men whose lives he sought might even then be within reach of his hand, knowing that he meant to betray them.

He exulted in the thought.

He had sent the marshal away knowing that the fight would be to the death.

As he listened the sound of stealthy footsteps came again from the rear room.

The heavy window shades were closely drawn, and the room was pitchy dark.

Even the faint light of the stars was excluded.

The steps drew nearer, and Clark crept noiselessly toward the door leading into the kitchen.

In an instant there came a movement at the front door, and Clark realized that the fight would be two to one.

He moved back into the corner and waited, expecting every moment to hear the front door open.

The person in the kitchen no longer attempted to conceal his presence.

He advanced boldly to the doorway and whispered:

"Clark!"

There was no answer.

"Come," he continued. "Your little game is spoiled. You may as well make your escape now, for it will be impossible for you to make the treacherous disclosures you promised."

Clark crept nearer to the doorway.

"You have the papers?" he whispered.

"Yes."

The front door opened softly.

Guided by the sound of the man's voice, Clark sprang forward.

In an instant a desperate struggle was in progress.

"Madman!" panted the attacked man, "what would you do?"

"Punish a murderer!" was the reply.

The struggle was now on the floor.

Clark struck hard and quick, for he knew that a third person was advancing upon him from behind.

He felt the warm blood of his enemy gushing into his face.

In a moment all resistance ceased.

Then he sprang to his feet.

At that instant hurried steps came up the walk from the gate.

The marshal was returning with the detective.

There was a quick movement and a blow, and Clark fell to the floor, the blood pouring from a wound in his breast.

His antagonist bounded over his prostrate body and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

Then Clark looked up to see the light of the detective's dark lantern shining in his face.

He tried to speak, and Nick bent over him.

"What does he say?" asked the marshal.

"He is trying to repeat a name."

There was a moment's silence. Nick bent closer and listened.

It was too late!

Clark made one convulsive movement and fell back.

"It is over," said the marshal.

"Yes."

"And with the man perishes our clew?"

"I am afraid so."

Nick said not a word regarding the plain disobedience of orders which had led to this result.

He turned to the second figure lying on the floor.

There was no hope there.

The man was dead.

An examination of the pockets of the dead men revealed nothing.

Nick coolly produced his measuring tape and laid it upon the foot of the dead man.

"This fellow," he said, "is the man who fired the cottage this morning."

"And the man who has just escaped?"

"Is doubtless the disguised attorney," said Nick, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAUNDRY LIST.

"It strikes me," said Chick, laying a bundle of papers on the table, "that the case is at an end."

"Why do you say that?" asked Nick, with a smile.

"Well," replied Chick, "Simey Clark died without giving you the slightest clue; is that true?"

"Certainly."

"And you know nothing of the motive of the crime?"

"That is hardly right," said Nick, "but go on."

"And you know nothing of the whereabouts of the murderer or the man who visited the cottage in disguise that day?"

"The seeming attorney does business here."

"How do you know that?"

"His face told me, when I stated that I might yet call on him in Chicago in connection with the case."

"Well, admit that he does live here," said Chick, "that does not prove that the murderer also lives here."

"I think it does. The two men are working together. Besides, Clark came here to find them."

"Admit that, and what have you gained. You would not know the murderer if you should meet him on the street."

"Oh, yes, I would."

"From the written description you just handed me?"

"Yes."

Chick laughed.

"Where did you get that description?" he asked.

"I found it under the raspberry bushes in the cottage garden."

For a moment the assistant was with Nick Carter's methods of work. Chick could not conceal his surprise.

"It is plain enough," said Nick. "I learned the color and texture of his clothes from the shreds which caught on the thorny stick you see there on the table."

"Well?"

"I got his height from my tape measure. He lay at full length on the ground under the bushes, and the marks of his feet and one shoulder were quite distinct."

"Very good."

"I got his complexion from the hairs which caught on the bushes."

"What?"

"His hair is very harsh, coarse, and black, so the chances are a hundred to one that he has a swarthy skin and black eyes."

"But the shoes?"

"The points of the toes showed plainly in the garden, and they were unmistakably 'toothpicks.'"

"But he may not wear such shoes here."

"Yes he will. He is a good dresser, and that style of shoes are now all the rage."

"Well, admit all this," said Chick, fairly driven into a corner, "what do you know about the past life of the woman and her husband? I have you there, at least."

"My son," said Nick, with a smile, "don't decide the case until the proof is all in."

As he spoke, Nick laid a partly printed and partly written paper before his assistant.

Chick seized it eagerly, looked it over, and laid it down with a laugh.

"This is simply a laundry list," he said.

"Very true," was the reply, "but it is the clew we want."

"You are too deep for me," said Chick, lighting a cigar.

"Please observe the name on the list."

Chick picked up the list once more.

"The name seems to be Mrs. Sarah Simey," he said.

"Exactly," replied Nick, "and it was found among the effects of the dead woman in the cottage."

Chick sprang to his feet, all excitement.

"And so," he said, "Mrs. Sidney Clark at Verona became Mrs. Sarah Sidney in Chicago?"

"It seems so."

"You beat me," said Chick. "Here I have been wondering why you came to Chicago to complete the case, when it is as plain as day."

"Yes," said Nick, "the conspiracy which ended in the murder of the husband and wife began in Chicago a year ago."

"Still," ventured Chick, doubtfully, "you have lost track of the man who lay in the garden that morning, and also of the man with the false whiskers. They may be in San Francisco by this time."

"That does not matter," was the reply. "With the past life and associations of the dead woman laid bare before me, I will have no difficulty in locating her murderers."

"By the way," said Chick, "how do you know that the man who lay concealed in the garden committed the murder?"

"Because the kitchen floor told me so. In the struggle the loam from the garden became scattered over the floor. I found bits of it under the patches of clay, which fell from Sidney Clark's rubber boots, which proves that it was there before he returned from the fruitless errand on which he was sent by the murderer."

The two detectives were sitting in a cozy room in the Palmer House, Chicago.

It was evening, and Nick had been in the city several hours, while Chick had just arrived from New York, in response to a telegram from his chief.

"Say what you will," said Chick, in a moment, "with any other man but Nick Carter, the laundry list would prove but a slender clew."

"The list is numbered," said Nick, "which is not usual. Look at the paper and tell me the number."

"It is No. 4,575."

"Exactly; and the name is there, too?"

"Yes, but the name will not be found on the books of the laundry."

"But the number is there."

"Of course."

"And the address of the customer will also be found there."

"Perhaps not. You see, it was delivered at the laundry office."

Nick smiled.

"But it is there," he said, "for I found it there. Mrs. Sarah Sidney did not call for all her clothing. Some of it was delivered at the house where she lived."

"Well?"

"Well, all we have to do now is to ascertain what sort of a life the woman lived there, and who her associates were."

"That will be easy enough to do."

"Then we must learn why she, a woman of great wealth, lived the life of a mechanic's wife in a country town."

"A woman of great wealth?"

Chick repeated the words of his chief with a look of incredulity on his face which was highly amusing to Nick.

"Yes," said the detective, "the scraps of paper I rescued from the kitchen stove show that she was worth a million."

"What were the papers?"

"Statements of bank dividends and requests for proxies in board elections."

"This is astonishing."

"And now," said Nick, "the next thing is to discover by what crime, or series of crimes, this woman secured this money."

"You think she came by it unlawfully?"

"I am sure of it. The man and woman were in hiding in that village, if I am not greatly mistaken. And they were in deadly fear of their former confederates, the men who finally murdered them."

"Have you any idea what the box contained?"

"Probably bonds and incriminating letters."

"I see."

After some further conversation the detectives retired for the night.

They occupied adjoining rooms, both facing on State street.

The door to Nick's room opened into a narrow hall-way running east and west.

There was a closet at the east side of the room.

Besides opening into Nick's room, the apartment occupied by Chick also opened on a short hall to the east, the rooms having been arranged for use either singly or en suite.

Before retiring Nick placed the package of papers secured at the cottage under his pillow.

About midnight he awoke with every sense alert,

All was still in the room, but he knew that his slumber had been disturbed by some unusual sound.

The inside blinds of the front windows were closed, but the slats were open, and a stream of light crept in from the street.

The detective lay perfectly still, breathing heavily, as if still sound asleep.

Presently there was a movement in Chick's room.

The sound was not like that made by a man moving in his bed, but resembled that made by a person moving softly across a carpeted floor.

Nick listened intently for some sign from his assistant, thinking that he might have left his bed for some purpose.

The next moment satisfied him that this was not the case.

There were two distinct sounds in the next room, and they came from different parts of the apartment.

Chick was breathing regularly in his bed, while the soft movement on the carpet came from a point nearer to the door connecting the two rooms.

From where he lay the detective could see the open doorway.

The intruder had not yet reached it.

Nick left his bed with one quick, silent movement, and crept into the closet, taking his precious package with him and leaving the door slightly ajar.

He could now observe whatever took place in the room without himself being in sight.

"The fellow seems to have a good deal of nerve," he thought. "I wonder whether he means robbery or murder?"

The next moment the figure of a man made its appearance in the open doorway.

In leaving his bed Nick had taken care to arrange the clothing so as to give the impression that it was still occupied.

The man in the doorway stood perfectly still for a moment, and then turned toward the bed.

As he did so the detective saw that he was a new man in the case.

He was too tall to fit the description of the man who had committed the murder, and much too heavy to be mistaken for the disguised lawyer.

Nick remained perfectly still while the fellow crept toward the bed.

He was thinking fast.

"He is a mere tool," he thought, "who does not know the risk he is running in coming here. He doubtless thinks he is here to plunder some sleepy traveler. Now the question is, what shall I do with him?"

The fellow was now bending over the bed, and Nick had very little time to decide.

"If I arrest him," he thought, "that will only close his mouth. The crime of entering an occupied room in the night time is not a serious one, and the fellow will take his pun-

ishment and remain silent. Still, I can't arouse Chick, and I am in no shape to follow him now, though he will doubtless go straight to the man who employed him to do this job."

The detective would have given a good many dollars to have been dressed and ready for the street.

While he studied over the matter, he was treated to an unexpected surprise.

The figure bending over the bed made no movement to molest what he evidently believed to be a sleeping man.

Slipping his hand under the pillow, he sought the package which the detective had removed.

After a moment's search he drew a package from his pocket and pushed it under the pillow.

Then for the first time he seemed to discover that the bed was unoccupied.

He hesitated a moment, but did not remove the package.

Presently he turned away and moved toward the door of Chick's room.

Nick knew well enough what it all meant.

The fellow had placed an infernal machine in his bed.

"It is a desperate scheme," Nick thought, "but a clever one for all that. I wonder how long it will run before exploding?"

A little thought convinced Nick that the machine would run a long time before entering upon its work of destruction.

Had it been set for quick work, it would not have been placed in the bed in the absence of the man it was designed to kill.

Doubtless believing that the occupant of the bed had left it only temporarily, the fellow had left the infernal machine there to do its deadly work after his return.

In a moment the would-be murderer passed through the doorway into Chick's room, and the package which he had placed under the pillow began its work.

The detective's habit of always leaving his clothes so that he could dress in an instant now stood him in good stead.

Still, the intruder would have been out of the room and lost in the tangle of hall-ways beyond had not fortune favored the detective.

As the fellow reached the middle of the room Chick moved uneasily in his sleep and yawned.

Crouching back against the wall, the fellow waited.

Nick understood what had taken place.

He softly removed the infernal machine from the bed and held it up to his ear.

Then he heard the faint ticking of clock-work.

Stepping to a pitcher of water sitting in the room, he carefully immersed the machine. Then he listened again.

The water had penetrated the interior of the machine, and the clock-work had stopped.

There was no longer any danger from the apparatus.

"Now," thought the detective, "if Chick only sleeps soundly to let this fellow out of the room without frightening him, I shall soon know who sent him here."

Fortune again favored the detective, for his assistant turned over and slept again.

Then the intruder opened the door and stepped out into the hall.

Waiting only an instant, Nick followed him.

The little hall was empty, but Nick heard the stealthy footsteps of the fellow on the stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. SARAH SIDNEY.

When Chick awoke in the morning he saw his chief standing by his side with a queer looking apparatus in his hand.

"What have you there?" he asked.

"This," was the reply, "is infernal machine No. 10."

"Do you mean," asked Chick, springing out of bed, "that you have received another of those funny little machines?"

"Yes," was the reply, "and it makes the tenth one that has been presented to me since I have been engaged in the detective business."

In a few words Nick explained what had taken place in the rooms on the previous night.

"I am ashamed of myself for sleeping so soundly," said Chick, "but I had been up for several nights, and nature will have her way now and then. It is a good thing you are a light sleeper."

"You would have spoiled everything by waking," said Nick.

"Where did the fellow take you?" asked the assistant.

"To a gambling house not far from the government-building," replied Nick.

"Well?"

"I learned that the place is kept by one William Ball, that the man I had followed would talk with no one but the proprietor, then I came away."

"Without getting inside, or sizing the proprietor up?"

"Certainly. The proprietor will keep. We can get him at any time. Besides, I was anxious to get back to bed."

"But you did not come back here?"

"Yes, I did, and found you sleeping like a baby."

"Now," said Chick, "the question is this, is the proprietor of the gambling-house the man you came here to find, or is he another part of the murder?"

"I secured a description of the man from an officer," was the reply, "and it tallies exactly with the description of the man who lay concealed in the garden of the cottage on the morning of the murder."

"That seems to settle the case," said Chick. "The rest is simply a matter of detail."

"Hardly. We must collect our proof before making a single arrest. We must find out, first of all, what interest this man had in the death of Mrs. Sidney Clark."

"You are right, as usual," said Chick.

"The first thing to do," continued Nick, "is to go to the address secured at the laundry and ascertain what sort of a life the woman lived in Chicago."

"Of course."

"This will in some way connect her with the man who took her life, and then the whole gang can easily be brought to book."

"And there are the banks referred to in the partly destroyed papers," suggested Chick. "It might be well to find out what is known about her there."

"Yes, that is a good job for you. In the meantime we shall make it appear that we have left the city, frightened away by the attempt of last night, by causing the noon editions of the daily papers to insert an item to that effect, without mentioning our names or in any way referring to this murder case."

"Just the thing."

While Chick was dressing, Nick wrote the notice as he desired to have it appear and took it down to the clerk, who readily promised to secure its insertion.

This done, Chick started away to the banks, while Nick sought the house where the woman had lived under the name of Sarah Sidney.

To say that he was surprised when he reached the number expresses it very mildly.

The house was an elegant brown-stone front, situated in an aristocratic neighborhood near the lake front on the north side.

The spacious grounds surrounding the structure had been laid out with great care and at great expense, but they now showed lack of attention.

The house looked deserted, and the few outbuildings were falling into decay.

No one answered the detective's ring, and he was turning away to secure the information he desired in another quarter when an officer paused at the gate.

"The house is unoccupied," he said, shortly.

Nick passed out of the gate and walked up and down, talking with the policeman, a long time.

As he turned toward the south side again, he thrust a bank-note into the fellow's hand.

When Nick reached the hotel, he found Chick there waiting for him.

The detectives, who would not have been recognized by their best friends as the men who had engaged rooms there the night before, were shown to new apartments.

"This is proper," said Nick, with a smile, "for we are supposed to be on the way to New York now, scared away by that machine."

"What did you learn?" asked Chick.

"Wait a moment," was the reply. "Tell me what you discovered at the banks."

"Mrs. Sarah Sidney——" began Chick.

"Inherited a large sum of money from an unexpected source about a year ago," interrupted Nick.

"Precisely."

"And," continued Nick, "she invested a large share of the money in bonds and bank stock. What next?"

"A short time ago every dollar of the bank stock was disposed of."

"And there the bank lost track of her."

"Certainly."

"And that is all?"

"Every word I could get out of the bankers."

"Now," said Nick, in a moment, "I want you to go to the chief of police and make inquiries regarding this man Ball, the keeper of the gambling-house I visited last night.

"If he has ever been arrested as proprietor of the house, I want to know the name of the lawyer who defended him.

"If he has been arrested more than once, and has employed different attorneys, get a description of each one of them.

"Then, find out all you can about the character of the man and the lawyers, taking special pains to learn all you can regarding the financial condition of our friend Ball. I will be here at two o'clock to receive your report."

Chick laughed.

"I understand what you want," he said, "and when I come to a man resembling the disguised attorney I shall go no farther. Is that all right?"

"Yes," said Nick, "if you also find out whether Ball is in bad shape financially."

"And where he was on the night before the murder at the Verona cottage?"

"We can reach that point in another way," said Nick, turning away.

Chick took his departure at once, and half an hour later Nick was closeted with a famous physician in his private office on State street.

"Up to within a few weeks of her death," he said, abruptly, "you were the family physician of the late Mrs. Lucy Hamilton?"

The physician nodded.

"You were finally dismissed by the nephew of the woman, your place being taken by a physician picked up somewhere in Europe?"

"I fail to see," said the doctor, "why we should discuss the matter at this late day. Mrs. Hamilton paid with her life the penalty of her rash act."

"Of her nephew's act, you mean?"

"No, she dismissed me in person, although she did it at the instigation of the man you mention."

"You understood her case thoroughly?"

"I thought so at the time."

"And you naturally kept track of the case up to the time of her death?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever had suspicions as to the real cause of her death?"

"I certainly have."

"You know where her property went?"

"Yes, and that is another strange feature of the case."

Nick drew his chair closer to that of the doctor, and the two men talked in low tones for an hour.

"Well," said Nick, rising to depart at the end of the interview, "if you will call at the place mentioned at three o'clock this afternoon, I will convince you that your suspicions were well founded."

The doctor bowed, and Nick hastened away.

The detective seemed to desire a good deal of medical advice that day, for the next place he stopped at was the office of another noted physician, who lived in magnificent quarters on a fashionable street, and had the reputation of being very wealthy.

After waiting some time in an outer room, Nick was shown to the doctor's private apartment.

"I have a strange question to ask," he said, throwing himself into a chair.

The doctor lifted his well-turned eyebrows in surprise.

"Proceed," he said. "My time is valuable."

"I want to know," said Nick, "whether it is possible to recall to life for one instant a person practically dead."

"That is indeed a strange question," said the doctor, glancing keenly at the detective.

"Can it be done?"

"Perhaps. We learn many strange things in foreign lands."

"But it would cost money?"

"A large sum of money."

"Has it ever been done?"

The doctor hesitated.

"I have had a great many strange cases," he finally said.

"I feel encouraged by your words and manner," said Nick. "Now, supposing such a thing should be done, what condition would the woman's—if it was a woman—mind be in during the brief time she continued to live after being called back to life?"

"That depends on the medicines used."

"Would the will power exist?"

"Hardly."

"Would she be responsible for her acts?"

"I should say not."

"She would simply be the creature of another?"

"Yes."

The doctor's voice was growing husky, and his face was very pale.

"Then she would do whatever she was told to do? She would even undo the work of a life-time at a command whispered in her ear?"

"She might."

The doctor sank into a chair and wiped great drops of perspiration from his face.

"What do you mean by asking all these questions?" he demanded, in a voice trembling with excitement.

"I am an officer of the law," was the cool reply, "and I am working on a case in which such an occurrence might have taken place."

The doctor gasped and reached out for a glass of wine.

Nick noticed that he took the glass from a distant corner of the table, where it had been concealed by a pile of papers, and that it contained a white sediment.

As the doctor was about to raise the glass to his lips, the detective took it from his hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but there is something floating on the wine. Allow me to remove it."

As he spoke Nick stepped to the sink,

emptied the glass of its contents, and refilled it from a decanter on the table.

"You might have poisoned yourself," he added.

"It was nothing," gasped the doctor.

"To return to our case," resumed Nick. "If I understand you correctly, there would be no danger of the use of the wonderful drug being discovered?"

"Tell me who you are!" almost shouted the doctor.

"I am Nick Carter, at your service."

"At last!"

The doctor would have fallen to the floor but for the supporting arm of the detective.

When Nick left the office, a few moments later, the doctor accompanied him, and "Closed for the day" was the sign posted on the door.

Nick felt satisfied with his morning's work.

CHAPTER VII.

SOLVING THE MYSTERY — NICK CARTER'S PARTY.

"Well," asked Nick, walking into Chick's room at the Palmer House, "what about William Ball and the attorney?"

"First," replied Chick, "William Ball is a gambler in hard luck."

"What is his record with the officers?"

"He has been arrested many times."

"And has always been defended by the same lawyer?"

"Yes."

"And that lawyer is the man who visited the cottage in disguise?"

"Undoubtedly. You seem to know all about what I discovered."

Nick pondered a moment.

"How long has Ball been in hard luck?" he finally asked.

"About six months. Before that time he played on the outside, losing large sums of money at poker, faro, and on the races."

"He had plenty of money a year ago, then?"

"Yes, he was very wealthy at that time. The chief thinks he must have squandered a million in yachts, horses and cards. With the remnants of his fortune he bought the gambling-house, hoping to win back some of his money."

"And failed."

"Yes. Everything goes against him."

"Did you learn where he got his fortune? He certainly did not accumulate it."

"No; he inherited it from a most unexpected source."

"I thought so, and he has been receiving money from unknown quarters during the past six months, all of which has been squandered."

"How do you know that?"

Nick smiled.

"You shall know at the proper time," he said.

Nick walked thoughtfully up and down the floor for some moments.

"Do you know where to find this lawyer?" he finally asked.

"Certainly. His name is Simon Edwards, and he has offices on La Salle street."

"What do the officers say regarding him?"

"His reputation is decidedly shady, still he seems to have plenty of money."

"Well, put on a messenger suit and go to his office. Tell him to be at the old homestead on the lake shore at dusk to-night. Say that William Ball ordered you to tell him, and that Ball is out of the city, and will be until night."

"Yes."

"Then go to the gambling-house and ask for Ball. Tell him the same thing, with the necessary changes."

"Yes."

"Then come back here."

Chick hastened away and Nick sat down to wait.

The assistant was not gone long. He came back well pleased with his success. He had found both men readily, and both had promised to keep the appointments.

Just before three o'clock the two detectives entered the old house from the rear, Nick using his pick-lock in order to gain admittance.

A few moments later, a soft knock sounded on the basement door, and Nick admitted the doctor he had first visited.

"I am giving a little party here," the detective said, with a smile, "and expect more guests presently."

Leaving the basement door unlocked, the two detectives and their companion ascended to the second story of the house.

The doctor pointed out a room at the front of the building.

"She occupied that apartment during her illness," he said.

Entering the room, the doctor at once proceeded to a large closet opening from it.

The closet was well lighted, and the walls on two sides were lined with shelves. The shelves were filled with bottles, either empty or partly filled with medicine. The bottles were of all sizes, and were tightly corked and neatly labeled.

The doctor began at the window and examined every bottle in turn, passing some with a hasty reading of the label and uncorking some.

Now and then he put one aside with the remark that the contents had not been prescribed by him.

In an hour's time the examination was completed, and then the doctor looked up with an expression of disappointment on his face.

"You have not found what you expected to find?" asked Nick, who had watched every movement.

The doctor shook his head.

"Judging from the symptoms of the woman, as learned from the old nurse," he said, "there ought to be other medicines here."

"The ones before us would not produce the results shown?"

"Decidedly not."

Nick removed a number of bottles and pressed a spring concealed in the window casing.

A small door flew open, revealing a small cupboard packed with bottles which were all partly filled and none of which bore a label.

"Please examine those," he said.

In a moment the doctor stepped back with a look of horror on his face.

"The proof is here," he said. "I wonder why they kept the stuff after it had done its work?"

"It is not an unusual mistake for murderers to make," said Nick, coolly. "It may be that the conspirators expected to have use for the remaining poisons, and so put them away in what they regarded as a perfectly secure place."

The detectives then spent an hour examining the different articles in the room.

Finally, in a secret drawer in a secretary, Nick discovered a large diary, written carefully in a woman's handwriting.

He spent some time reading it, and then placed it in his pocket.

Just then the door of the room opened, and a policeman in plain clothes stepped into the room.

"We entered without being observed," he said.

"Where is your companion?" asked Nick.

"In the basement, in charge of an officer," was the reply.

Nick pointed toward the closet.

"Conceal yourself there," he said, "and wait."

The two detectives and the doctor now descended to the parlor on the first floor.

Just then the sound of a key was heard in the front door, and a moment later William Ball stepped into the hall-way.

Nick motioned to Chick and the doctor to conceal themselves behind the heavy hangings and stepped forward.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Ball, catching sight of the detective.

Before Nick could reply the front door opened again and Simon Edwards entered the hall-way.

Nick was dressed exactly as he had been at the cottage, and the lawyer started back at the sight of him.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"If you two gentlemen will step into the parlor," replied Nick, "I will explain why I am here. I told you, Mr. Edwards, that I might meet you in Chicago."

Ball sprang forward with an oath.

"If you don't leave instantly," he said, "I will put you out with my own hands."

As the enraged man advanced upon the detective the lawyer checked him with a motion of his hand.

"Let us hear his explanation," he said.

"Now," began Nick, motioning the two men to seats in the parlor, and lighting the gas, "I have a short story to tell."

"Tell it to the policeman on the corner," said Ball, with a forced laugh.

"Some years ago," continued Nick, "three sisters inherited considerable money from their father.

"One of the sisters was married to Charles Hamilton, who lived but a short time. Her name was Lucy, and she bought this place

and settled here, finally becoming very rich.

"The second sister married Leonard Ball, who squandered his wife's fortune and sent her to her grave with a broken heart. This sister left a wild and reckless son named William."

"Come, come," broke in Ball, "there is no need to go into the history of the family."

"The third sister," continued Nick, without noticing the interruption, "married Clark Sidney, a gambler and a spendthrift.

"The wife of Leonard Ball was the only one of the three sisters to bear children, and only one of hers lived, the one I have mentioned.

"In the natural course of events he would have inherited the fortune of his aunt, as she had no children, but his conduct was such that she disinherited him.

"For a time she remained friendly with her sister and her husband, Clark Sidney, but in time their conduct became such that she cast them off, willing all her vast fortune to very distant relatives."

Ball laughed scornfully.

"You are off the track," he said. "She remembered her sister and her nephew at last."

"While living a vagabond life in London," resumed Nick, "William Ball picked up an unscrupulous physician in the slums and brought him to Chicago and put him on his feet with the proceeds of a crime committed in England."

"It is a lie!" said Ball.

"This doctor, Stephen Seymour by name, learned his lesson well, and in a short time became, by what subterfuges I am unable to state, the family physician of Mrs. Hamilton.

"Then the work of bringing the ruined and

poverty-stricken sister and nephew into favor with the woman, now in ill health, was begun, but did not succeed.

"So murder and fraud were decided upon."

Ball sprang to his feet and made a dash for the door, but Nick drew a pair of handcuffs from his pockets and motioned him back into the parlor.

"A subtle poison, unknown to most practitioners, was administered by the physician to the woman until she lay at the point of death. She still refused to see her sister or nephew, declaring that they should never handle a dollar of her money."

Ball moved uneasily in his chair, but did not again attempt to escape.

"Then the services of a disreputable lawyer named Simon Edwards were called in," resumed Nick.

"Be careful what you say," thundered the lawyer.

"A will was prepared dividing the property equally between the sister and the nephew," continued Nick, "and, in order to make the sudden change of purpose appear more natural, the sister and the nephew, without the knowledge of the dying woman, took up their residence in the house, being careful to keep out of sight of the woman they were slowly and cruelly murdering."

"This is a very pretty story," sneered the lawyer.

"At last the day set for the last act in the crime came, and the old will was still in force, the new one not having been signed," continued the detective.

"The doctor was called, and the woman seemingly died in his arms. Then a powerful drug was administered, the sister, the

nephew, and the servants were summoned to the bedside of the dying woman, and the new will was produced by the lawyer.

"While under the influence of the drug, and with the last strength of her life, Mrs. Hamilton signed that will and declared, repeating words whispered in her ear; that the act was of her own free will. The next moment she was dead.

"That will, prepared in fraud, and executed by a woman unconscious of her acts, was probated, and the property passed into the hands of her murderers."

"You shall pay for this," gasped the lawyer.

At a motion from Nick, Chick stepped from behind the drapery and took a position close to the lawyer, while Nick advanced toward Ball.

"There were many rumors of foul play after the death of the woman," continued Nick, "but the money of the murderers hushed them all. Then the nephew began to squander his money, and the sister became afraid of him.

"She sought to lose herself to him and her old associates by retiring with her husband to a small village, and more completely to keep up the deception, the husband worked as a common mechanic."

The lawyer and the gambler were now deadly pale.

"The nephew," resumed Nick, "shut up the house where the murder had been committed and set about spending his ill-gotten money. He did not even remove the remains of the poisons with which the woman had been killed.

"At last the nephew ran out of money. He

hunted up his aunt and began a systematic course of blackmail. The aunt supplied him with money to purchase a gambling-house, hoping that he would recover a part of his money.

"The hope was a vain one. The nephew made new demands for money, and the sister sold her bank stock and prepared to leave the country.

"Then the nephew decided to murder her and steal the bonds into which the money had been placed. He journeyed down to the village, decoyed the husband away by a note, and, after watching the house for some time from the garden, entered and murdered the sister by strangulation.

"The husband returned to find his wife dead on the floor. He knew at once that the nephew had committed the crime, but he lied to the village officers and went to his work as usual."

"Why should he do that?" sneered Ball.

"Because he knew Ball to be a coward as well as a murderer," was the reply. "He knew that Ball, with the rope about his neck, would implicate him in the murder of Mrs. Hamilton. So he formed the desperate resolve of killing the nephew with his own hand, and so ending the whole case.

"He did not succeed, but was murdered by Simon Edwards in the sitting-room of his own cottage, which the detective in charge of the case had temporarily left in charge of the village marshal."

Edwards sank back like a man in a faint.

"Before leaving the cottage, after the murder of his aunt," continued Nick, "Ball searched for the bonds and some identifying papers which he knew the woman to have in

her possession. He did not find the bonds, but he found part of the papers, and made an attempt to burn them.

"They were afterward found, only partly destroyed, by the detective, and used to good purpose.

"The bonds and the true will were secured by Simon Edwards on the night of the husband's murder, and where do you think the nephew hid them? In the secret closet where he had hidden the poisons."

Nick took a package of papers from his pocket as he spoke.

"These documents," he said, "were found in a secret hiding place in the cottage, which was undoubtedly discovered by the murderers only after long and patient watching. At some time before the murder they must have seen the woman open it.

"There are other details," added Nick, "which are unnecessary to repeat now, among which are the killing of a confederate by Sidney Clark—known in the village as Sidney Clark—and the attempted murder of the detective at the Palmer House last night."

"This is a very pretty story," said Ball. "How do you know that the woman murdered in the village was Mrs. Sarah Sidney?"

"Because of a small mole above her ear, and because of the papers found among her possessions. The most important of these papers was laundry list No. 4,575, which led to her former residence in this city, and pointed to this house, where she had had work sent. The rest was easy. Now, murderers, what do you say?"

"It is all false!" shouted Edwards.

At that moment the parlor door opened

and two policemen entered, leading the doctor Nick had that afternoon taken from his office.

"It is all true," said the doctor. "I can bear the strain no longer. I supplied the poison with which Mrs. Hamilton was murdered. Write it down! I administered the drug which brought back sufficient muscular power for her to sign the fraudulent will! Write that down! I have lived in deadly fear of William Ball ever since, for he has twice attempted the life I am weary of, and now gladly yield up!"

The doctor raised his hand to his mouth, and Nick sprang forward, but was too late. The doctor crushed a small pill between his teeth and fell back dead.

The old family physician stepped into the room.

"I have the remains of the poisons used," he said.

"If you like," said Nick, turning to the two prisoners, "I will show you where they were found."

"No, not there!" said Ball. "Take us out of this house. The air is heavy with blood."

"Tell me," said Nick, "what became of the confederate who left the infernal machine at the Palmer House last night."

"We know nothing of him," said the lawyer.

"It is useless to deny it," said Ball, tremblingly. "The man is employed at the gambling-house."

Chick took the man's name and description and hastened away.

In half an hour the two murderers were behind the bars at police headquarters, together with Nick's midnight visitor, who had

done him such good service in leading him to the gambling-house.

"Now," said Chick, as the detectives seated themselves in their room that night, "how did you learn about the three sisters? Surely the laundry list did not tell you that?"

"The policeman on that beat knew all about the family, about the new doctor, and the strange death, and about the new will at the last moment."

"That is strange."

"No," said Nick, "not under the circumstances, for the matter made quite a stir at the time, and the officer was at work on the case."

"But discovered nothing?"

"Nothing. Well, he told me about the doctors, and the family physician told me enough to go on when I met the man who killed himself in the house. When I stated a suppositious case to him he weakened. The rest came easy. The doctor who committed suicide was tired of life."

"But how did you learn so much about Mrs. Hamilton?"

"Found her diary."

"And the secret closet in the large one?"

"The doctor described where the poisons were kept after I took him to headquarters this afternoon."

"Well," said Chick, "it makes a pretty case, but isn't it strange that Clark, as he was called, did not know where the bonds and papers were kept?"

"It does seem strange," was the reply, "but the chances are that his wife was afraid of him. He might have been the sort of a fellow to have made off with them."

"That is probably it."

The lawyer and Ball were convicted in Chicago of the murder of Mrs. Hamilton, and executed, while the confederate was sent up for a long term of years for the infernal machine act.

The heirs named in the first will received the property.

"And it all came about through laundry list

No. 4,575," said Nick; as he read of the hanging while seated in his New York home.

"That is all right," said Chick, "but the laundry list had to be backed by brains and activity."

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "Nick Carter Saves a Reputation; or, A Button Worth a Fortune."

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